TRENHOLM

IN MEMORIAM

GEORGE ALFRED TRENHOLM

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A

TRIBUTE

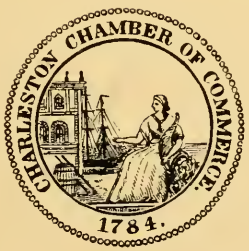
OF

AFFECTION AND RESPECT

FROM THE

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,

CHARLESTON, S. C., DECEMBER 20, 1876.



MEMORIAL MEETING.

In response to the call of S. Y. TUPPER, President, the members of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce assembled in their rooms at one o'clock, P. M., on 20th December, 1876, to pay their tribute to the memory of the late Honorable GEORGE ALFRED TRENHOLM, a former President, and for many years a prominent and influential member of the Association.

In announcing the objects of the meeting, President TUPPER said—

Gentlemen of the Chamber of Commerce—It is no unusual occurrence that brings us together. It is the *one* solemn and inevitable event in the history of every human being.

Mr. GEORGE A. TRENHOLM, a distinguished member and ex-President of this Chamber, is no more. His earthly career is ended. But the remembrance of his usefulness, his commanding abilities, and the influence of his character, remains with us for emulation and applause.

If I speak of his virtues as a citizen, his integrity as a merchant, and his sincerity as a friend, I should only utter what is known to all of you.

Accustomed as we have been for many years to look to him for counsel, confiding in his sound judgment, matured wisdom and experience in commercial affairs, whom have we now to fill his place?

We have cause to lament the death of our most distinguished member, whose superior intelligence and eminent services gave tone and reputation to this Chamber.

Our halls have resounded with his eloquence. He was an orator in the full meaning of oratory—the art of persuasion. That voice shall be heard no more which encouraged or restrained us in our deliberations upon subjects of grave and public importance; and who among us presumed too much upon his own opinions when his ripe intellect and intelligence had pronounced upon questions of commercial policy, law and usage; and when have we ever erred in following his counsels?

Our records are filled with his wisdom, and his death has canonized the name of a great merchant upon those records. But while we deplore that the light is extinguished which once guided us safely through paths of uncertainty, yet our hearts are grateful that he has left us the legacy of his name and the reputation of his splendid abilities.

It is with some hesitation, and I trust with proper humility, that I refer to my own deprivation

since his last illness, in finding none so wise, so friendly, so patient as himself, with whom to advise in the cares which often beset me in my official position. I look back with much emotion to the last interview I had with Mr. TRENHOLM. He had just advised against a proposed union on the part of this Chamber with a popular foreign commercial association, whose agent was then in this city, and his arguments were so just, so clear and forcible; so filled with concern for the interests of this Chamber, that in yielding my ambitious views to his judgment, I pronounced him my "commercial father." He answered not, but gave me his hand, and with that warm pressure we parted never to meet again this side of eternity.

I desire to speak but in general terms of Mr. TRENHOLM, and of those qualities by which he was best known to us. I attempt no narrative of his eventful life; that duty has been ably though briefly performed by a faithful chronicler of the day. I may be permitted, however, to refer to his devotion to his native City and State. That devotion was earnest and uncompromising, and became more intense when we had reached our present fallen political condition. Latterly he consented to become a candidate and was elected to the Legislature. No honor could possibly attach to the office save that of the discharge of

duty and the sacrifice of comfort and every personal interest. To restrain vice and ignorance, to interpose his lofty character against misrule and injustice, were doubtless the motives of his action. Earnest in the advocacy of the right, he was fearless in the denunciation of wrong; and who has not marked the readiness and boldness with which he ever vindicated his principles and opinions.

What has been said of another memorable man may justly be said of Mr. TRENHOLM: "He had too much merit not to excite some jealousy; too much virtue to provoke enmity."

Mr. TRENHOLM was the true type of a Southern gentleman. He was social, considerate, and magnanimous; modest and unassuming; regardful of the feelings of others. Knowing his powers he affected no superiority over others. He seemed ever hopeful and cheerful, and his disposition was marked for its urbanity and kindness.

As a merchant we knew him best. He was diligent, methodical, and faithful to his engagements; and who doubts his great wisdom and sagacity in all commercial matters? It is here that his character is most impressed upon us and worthy of our emulation. He was a true merchant of our better days. Educated and refined, his respectful attention to all, his dignity and gentle decorum made it a pleasure to have intercourse with him even amidst the most perplex-

ing cares of business. In this respect he had but few peers, and no superiors.

But there is a deeper sorrow than ours, where the ties of natural affection and dependence have been freshly broken; a grief that we cannot know. We dare not lift the veil of this sacred sorrow, but we may sympathize in the bereavement, for we too have some cause to mourn; and for the sake of the living and the dead it is well for us to give honor where honor is due.

We gave him our confidence in life, let us be faithful to his memory in death.

Mr. E. HORRY FROST, the Senior Vice-President of the Chamber, then introduced the following preamble and resolutions of respect to the memory of the deceased, as expressive of the feelings of the members:

I could wish, Mr. President, it had fallen to the lot of some one more capable than myself to offer these resolutions in memory of Mr. TRENHOLM; he was a man whose name will live so long in this City and State, and be held in such estimation, and whose fame as a merchant, and even in politics, was so extended into all parts of our country, and, I may say of the world, that justice to his memory requires a more able pen than mine; it is, however, within the province of

any to offer a tribute upon the tomb of worth and eminence, and it is in this spirit that I avail myself of the sad privilege.

One of my first recollections of Mr. TRENHOLM is of him as a member of this Chamber, in which for a time he held the highest office, and in which he was always pre-eminently a guiding and a ruling spirit; if there was at any time occasion for counsel or for action, the fruits of a fertile mind and a ready hand; if we were to be represented abroad, or were called upon to make some public demonstration at home; if we needed one gifted with eloquence or persuasiveness, or one who would attract the attention of men and reflect honor upon ourselves, it was to him that we instinctively turned, and without him we hardly thought that our acts of business or ceremony had their full expression.

The qualities which distinguished him here he carried, of course, into all assemblies or bodies of men with which he was connected, and his loss to them is doubtless equally great; and yet this reflection does not diminish the peculiar force with which we feel it to fall upon ourselves; we regarded him as one always of us and with us, one whom we were proud to put forward as our representative, and who endeared himself to us by his frequent presence, his geniality and his friendship; he seemed to us to belong to this

Chamber, and the gap he has left is so wide that we do not know where to look to fill it.

As a merchant Mr. TRENHOLM was distinguished for the large grasp of his mind and the energy which he infused into his undertakings; these qualities account for the immense extent of his business operations, for the success which in the main attended them, and for the readiness with which if at any time disaster befell him, he immediately recovered himself, compelling it, as it were, to be but temporary. There was a time when he seemed to have almost the entire commerce of Charleston under his sway; her exports, her imports, her banks, her railroads, her wharves, her shipping, all felt the impulse of his moving spirit; there was no department of business he did not touch, and there was none to which he did not give life and vigor; his heart panted to make Charleston a great commercial city; the vision of her future wealth and greatness was always before his eyes, and the way to it he not only showed to others, but led in it with mighty steps and undaunted courage.

As a statesman and politician his acts have gone into history, and in her own time the muse of History will relate them properly; to her guardian care we can safely and most wisely leave them; we do not, however, trench upon her domain if we now say, that to the political

affairs of the State and of the country he brought the same grasp of mind and energy which he bestowed upon his private affairs; and to these great qualities he added a spirit of self-renunciation and self-sacrifice for the sake of public duty, exhibited on more than one occasion, which must always be an example to men, and which we should never forget.

The last instance is, perhaps, the most noteworthy, at least it is the freshest in our memories, and was the fitting conclusion of a consistent life. It was when, two years ago, at the call of us, his fellow-citizens, he gave up the loved and pleasant society of his home; in health then failing, renounced his ease and comfort; relinquished the care of his business; laid aside the remembrance of his ancient fame; forgot that he was a prince among merchants, and had sat in Cabinets, an adviser in the struggle of mighty nations; laid aside the pride which might well have led him to believe it his due to be called only to the very highest places in the land; and for months gave his time, for the public good, to his duties as a member of the Legislature of his State—a Legislature so sadly changed from that in which in former years he had been an ornament and a power; and he accepted this office, not because any additional honor or profit would come to him—his life was nearly spent, his fame was

made, he was entitled to the ease and rest which his long labors had earned for him—but because his fellow-citizens believed that his services there would be useful to them; and they were eminently so, but above them all was the example of self-sacrifice which he set for the imitation of those who are to follow him; and it was during the discharge of this his last public duty that he first felt the approach of that disease which has since taken him from our sight.

Last and best! As in life he had been a follower of our Lord and a seeker of His grace, so in death he was able to trust in Him.

In accordance with these remarks, I therefore offer to the Chamber the following resolutions for their acceptance:

RESOLVED, That in the death of the Hon. GEORGE A. TRENHOLM this Chamber has lost a member to whom it has owed much of its prosperity, whose ability to serve it was only equalled by his zeal, and whose exertions in its behalf were continued through his whole life; the commerce of the city has lost one of its ablest, most sagacious, and most enterprising promoters; the State has lost a faithful son, who served her in high places, who brought to her counsels wisdom and ability, and adorned her assemblies with eloquence and dignity; and the community has lost a citizen who was to it an honor and an ornament.

RESOLVED, That this Chamber will always cherish his memory, bearing in mind his constant and distinguished services, and the high example which his life has afforded.

RESOLVED, That copies of the proceedings of this meeting be sent to Mr. TRENHOLM'S family, and that the Chamber offer to them its sincere sympathy in their bereavement.

RESOLVED, That the proceedings of this meeting be published in the daily papers.

Hon. HENRY GOURDIN said—

Mr. President—The resolutions before the meeting, on this deeply afflicting occasion, will, without doubt, have the undivided approval of the Chamber. They express, without exaggeration, the feelings and sentiments of its members, and are simply true of our deceased ex-President. He was indeed at all times among the foremost, whether in his own vocation of Commerce, the counsels of our City, the Legislature of the State, or the leading enterprises that have been inaugurated in our day—the Bank of Charleston, the Blue Ridge Railroad, the improvements of the Bar and Harbor, and others of less note. And to his wisdom, energy and zeal, are largely due the usefulness of this Chamber, the high reputation it has acquired at home and abroad, and the influence it exercises in the affairs of the State, political as well as commercial and financial.

Mr. TRENHOLM was, in one sense, a self-made man—an example to others, to the youths of our country especially. It is true that he was highly gifted by nature; but his school education was short, for at the early age of thirteen the school

had to be abandoned for the counting-room, under the necessities of a widowed mother; but the abandonment of the school did not mean the abandonment of study and self-education. He had the faculty of uniting study with work, (a habit continued to the period of his last illness,) so that manhood found him the compeer of companions and associates, who, more fortunate than himself, had had all the benefits of the schools and colleges. Neither study or work were, however, labor to Mr. TRENHOLM. He acquired quickly and easily; and with wonderful facility gave form and shape to his own ideas in a manner to be readily understood by others. Not always wedded to his own opinions, and tolerant of the opinions of others, he as readily gave form and shape to theirs, as to his own. An orator by nature, he was graceful and forcible in debate, fertile in resources, and suggestive under every difficulty—withal social and impressive in society, he will long be remembered as one of the brightest and most accomplished men of our day, the most enterprising of our merchants, distinguished alike for his public usefulness, his benevolence, and private worth. A life invaluable to the State, to the City, and especially to this Chamber, has passed away, never to return; but we will perpetuate our remembrance of him by putting on our records this tribute to his worth.

I second the resolutions.

Mr. LOUIS D. DESAUSSURE said—

Mr. President—It is seldom that a commercial body, such as this Chamber, is called together to pay a tribute of respect to one of its deceased members who has been so eminent in life, and occupied for so long a period of time the first position as an intelligent and enterprising merchant; few men (who have not made politics the business of life) have filled so large a place in the public eye as the Hon. GEORGE A. TRENHOLM.

Commencing commercial life more than the half of a century ago, he exerted his energies in developing the commercial interests of the city and State. His intelligent mind has been active in forwarding almost every enterprise. The railroads of the country have received his earnest and untiring support. Agriculture, manufactures, and commerce have been advanced under his fostering care; and in times past no new enterprise was undertaken without the question being asked, "What does Mr. TRENHOLM think of it?" This expression conveys the idea of the estimation in which he was held.

Mr. TRENHOLM'S cultivated mind and high attainments, with his imposing presence and courteous manner, marked him in every circle in which he moved as a distinguished person. None ever came in personal intercourse with him without feeling the magnetism of his influence. Had

he turned his attention in life to the affairs of State, he would have been a most distinguished statesman and courtier, and have adorned as a representative of America, with refinement and elegance, any Court in Europe.

Though Mr. TRENHOLM preferred the life of a private citizen, he was not always allowed the liberty of pursuing it; and at a dark period of our Confederate history he was called on to guide the financial ship of the treasury through the storm which was gathering, and which finally, with an irresistible cyclone, wrecked our hopes of a Conservative Republic.

But the crowning event of Mr. TRENHOLM'S life, surrounded as he was by wealth, position, influence, and domestic elegance, was the high patriotism which he exhibited when, two years ago, he accepted the position of membership of the State Legislature, and in the discharge of his duty, mingled daily with the ignorant, insolent, and corrupt persons who composed that body.

Such noble self-sacrifice speaks volumes of his devotion to his native State, and received the gratitude of his fellow-citizens in their hour of trial.

A noble citizen has gone "to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

We shed a tear of deep sympathy with his family circle.

Capt. Wm. A. Courtenay said—

Mr. President and Gentlemen—I claim the privilege of sharing in this tribute of respect, which the Chamber fitly offers to the memory of one who, for nearly half a century, has given inspiration and impulse to our commercial, industrial, and public affairs; and, as others present will no doubt desire to be heard on this mournful occasion, I shall perhaps best observe its proprieties by limiting my remarks to a brief consideration only, of Mr. Trenholm's qualities as a merchant.

The general interest which is felt so distinctly and so widely, in this our especial bereavement, is manifested for one who, by common consent, satisfied the higher public estimate of what, in scope of vision, mental accomplishments, poise of character, and energy of action, constitutes the great merchant. I use this definition in its past sense. It is too common a practice in the present time to designate those as merchants, who merely buy and sell, and who consider mere barter an end in itself, to which all the faculties of a man may be entirely devoted, and not as the means to some of the worthiest objects for which a man can live.

Mr. Trenholm must have studied with youthful ardor the lives and characters of the founders of those renowned Florentine families, who created that unique prosperity which forms so valuable a chapter in the history of the Middle Ages—a pros-

perity growing out of that wonderful industrial triumph which declared it a civic privilege, to be engaged in a practical vocation—a civic disability, to be an idler of rank; conditions which crowned Florence with a culture which was felt in the goldsmiths' shops of the Ponte Vecchio, and may yet be seen in her renowned architectural and art trophies. His conception of a mercantile career was clearly pitched on such a plane as theirs—as of one occupied with broad views and an elevated activity—a pioneer of civilization, and a constant impulse to its advancement through the thousand channels in which its evolution is witnessed. He seemed to realize at every point of his life, that it is the merchant who gives to civilization first the rude initial force, and imparts to it the "sweetness and the light" of mature growth. The picturesque figure of speech, of the sea whitened with the sails of commerce, would never have been conceived, were it not that the merchant had furnished the subject. The romance of the ocean would have missed some of its most brilliant illustrations, if the keels which ploughed its bosom were only those of State and War. The world pays its highest honors to the faith of the navigator, who sails into unknown seas, and finds a new continent rising out of the waves; but the discoverer's skill and endurance are matched and backed by the faith of another, who has

equipped him for his mysterious voyage. Had Mr. TRENHOLM'S lot been cast on the banks of the Arno, in the fourteenth century, where commerce had its early dawn, he would have figured in the front rank of that mercantile element, which was the normal life of the Mediæval Republic, and would have conspicuously illustrated its essential principle, that only those who worked, should rule; and that patriotism, and ambition as well, should be brought to this economic test. But his life was not passed at the Porta Della Pera; his fortune was to live in a narrow field on the Ashley five centuries later. Entering upon his commercial career "an humble youth without family influence, fortune or favor, he broke through the shadows of obscurity, and by the light of his talents, virtues and industry, came to shine out upon us with a cheerful lustre. While some men were picking pebbles on the seashore, and others gazing idly on the billows, he was climbing unassisted from cleft to cleft up the rocky precipice of renown, whose towering heights seemed to frown upon but could not intimidate him; for he mastered them all, and his native City and State enjoyed the fruit and the honor of his labors."

A single illustration will suffice. By his sagacious enterprise, an entire fleet of ships carried our good city's name on their registers, and displayed

from their mastheads, to the foreign Hongs of China, to the heights behind Bombay, in the crowded docks of the Mersey and the Scheldt, the Thames and the Seine, the cheery signal flag of a native Charleston house. There was no greater depth of water then on Charleston bar than now, and yet the great staples of the South found easy exit hence, in Charleston ships, to the distant markets of the world; and they sailed back with great cargoes from beyond the Bosphorus to our city wharves. His was an unceasing, intelligent activity, with the means then at hand in full use, and a large success was achieved, because he had a large impulse behind him.

"A life in civic action warm,
A soul on highest mission sent,
A potent voice of Parliament,
A pillar steadfast in the storm."

It is for such a citizen, that the flags of the nations have been so recently drooped. It is for such a son, that Commerce for a time folds her white wings, and is still. Under the majestic branches of a giant oak, in our own city of the dead, is his fit resting place! He sleeps in the soil of his birth; in death as in life adhering to South Carolina. Standing by that new-made grave, let us invoke Nature, in the beautiful process of the seasons, to salute it with bud and

blossom, bright children of the earth and air; may all gardens bloom for it; field and forest send sweet tribute to it! And not altogether for him who has gone before, but as well for ourselves, that we may study his eventful life, learn wisdom of his great example, and, by the contemplation of his virtues and his labors, strive to lift up our thoughts and actions to the height of our own grave emergencies. May these dark days through which we are now moving, be gilded by the recollection of his patient fidelity in times as gloomy as now—inspiring us with fresh courage to work out our seeming dreary future, fortified by hopes like his, which were never allowed to grow dim—through that steadiness of aim, which finally made him "our chief of men."

Mr. Ch. Richardson Miles said—

After the feeling tributes which have been offered—so just, discriminating, and comprehensive—I should not venture to add any thing, but that I esteem it a privilege to unite in doing honor to one no less gifted as a man, and honored as a citizen, than he was great as a merchant.

In every thing which concerned the welfare of Charleston, Mr. Trenholm felt the deepest interest. Quick to apprehend, broad and far-seeing in his views, and fertile in resources, he would grasp, develop, and mature great enterprises, and

by his persuasive eloquence infuse into others the confidence and enthusiasm necessary for their successful accomplishment. Far from being narrowed by the pursuits of commerce, he illustrated the enlarging influence of the just conception of the position of a merchant, and thorough execution of its duties.

He never sought place, but the assumption of high duties was the natural consequence of his position; and the qualities which made him eminent in commerce, he carried into every position to which he was called.

In 1852 he consented to go to the Legislature of the State, to advance a great enterprise for the development of the interests of Charleston, of which he was an earnest advocate. Here he was in an appropriate and congenial sphere. Although without any Parliamentary training, or experience, yet

> ———"keen
> In intellect, with force and skill,
> To strive, to fashion, to fulfill,"

he at once assumed his place among the first members of the House, not only as a worker but as a debater. This position he retained during his entire term of service, which extended through several sessions. He was among the first men of

the Legislature of South Carolina, when that body was composed of the first men of the State. While still actively engaged in his extensive business, in the darkest days of our Confederacy he was called to take part in its government, and ably aided it by his counsels to the end; and faithfully adhered to the fallen fortunes of its head.

After peculiar hardships, and long delay, he returned to Charleston, and addressed himself with undiminished ability, and unabated energy, to rebuilding his fortunes, impaired by mercantile reverses.

He was thus engaged, when two years ago his fellow-citizens again called upon him to serve them; not as before, to take his place among the pure and elevated; to advocate enterprises of great pith and moment to enlarge our prosperity, and increase our wealth; but among the ignorant and corrupt, to stem the tide of ignorance and corruption which had swept over us, and to aid in saving something from the wreck of the Ship of State. This crowning act of his life has been so happily described by our Vice-President that I will not attempt to add any thing to the description; but those who witnessed the promptness and grace with which he acceded to the request to be a candidate, and know the cheerfulness with which he made the great sacri-

fices which the position involved, will ever remember it with pleasure and gratitude.

His influence for good in the Legislature surpassed the expectation of all; and he continued to discharge the arduous and trying duties of the position until prevented by illness. How, at this trying period, would we value his aid and counsel.

But those who knew him best turn from the contemplation of the great merchant, the honored statesman and patriot, and love to dwell upon the memory of the man.

He was indeed rarely gifted; strikingly handsome in feature, dignified and imposing in presence, with an irresistible charm and grace of manner, of brilliant conversational powers, and possessed of a winning and persuasive eloquence which never failed to impress all who came within the charmed circle of his influence.

In the days when Charleston was pre-eminent for her cultured society and refined hospitality, he lived up to his station, and

> ————"joined
> Each duty of the social hour,
> To noble manners, as the flower
> And native growth of noble mind."

There was another sphere in which his excellencies shone still brighter—the home, into which he never carried the cares and anxieties of his

busy life, but only the sunshine of his eagerly expected presence; but from that home we cannot lift the veil, but only stand reverently at its portal, and offer to those shrouded in grief within, our tender sympathy.

Upon the pillar of their trust many others leaned, and all looked with pride and pleasure on its graceful proportions and its beautiful finish; but the polished shaft is shattered, and we can only gather around, and wreath its broken fragments with garlands of grief and affection.

Let us garner up the memories, and teach to the coming generation the lessons of the life of Charleston's great merchant.

At the close of the addresses, the hushed silence in the apartment gave outward evidence of the sacred memories, and personal griefs, the quickened sense of the loss of a great and true friend, felt by those who participated in this mournfully impressive occasion. It was realized that his great career was a possession, and would abide with us—and that in the darkest hour of the future, when men shall seek some light to guide, they will turn to this memory, and in it find counsel and support. "It is the great and

good who leave us, who make possible the future."

Mr. WM. B. BURDEN offered the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That a Committee of three be appointed to print five hundred copies of these proceedings for the use of the members, and that copies be prepared and sent to the family of Mr. TRENHOLM.

The President appointed Messrs. WM. B. BURDEN, WM. A. COURTENAY, and T. W. BACOT, in compliance with the wishes of the Chamber, and the meeting then adjourned.

S. Y. TUPPER,
President.

P. J. BARBOT,
Secretary.

CHARLESTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
1784.